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# Fake News is Not the Problem: Addressing Issues with Information Consumption in a Digital Environment

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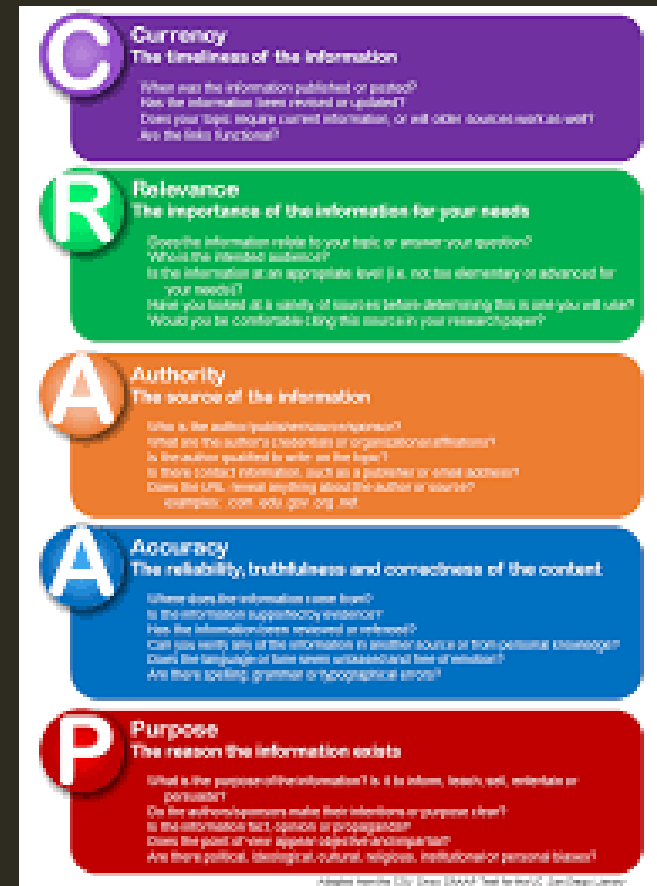
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**FAKE NEWS IS NOT THE PROBLEM:  
ISSUES WITH INFORMATION  
CONSUMPTION IN A DIGITAL  
ENVIRONMENT**

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# FAKE NEWS

Fake news is A  
problem, but it's  
not THE problem



**PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS**

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

## Cognitive Dissonance

The stress a person feels when confronted with new information that contradicts what they think they already know—their beliefs, ideas, and values

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

## Dealing with dissonance

- Addressing
  - Examining beliefs
  - Reevaluating based on new info
- Avoiding
  - Ignoring
  - Disbelieving

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

## Selective Exposure/Confirmation Bias

- Choosing to consume only specific sources
- Choosing to avoid specific sources
- Seeing/remembers only that evidence which supports
- Ignoring/overlooking everything that doesn't support



Topic

Overview

Question

Research

Thesis

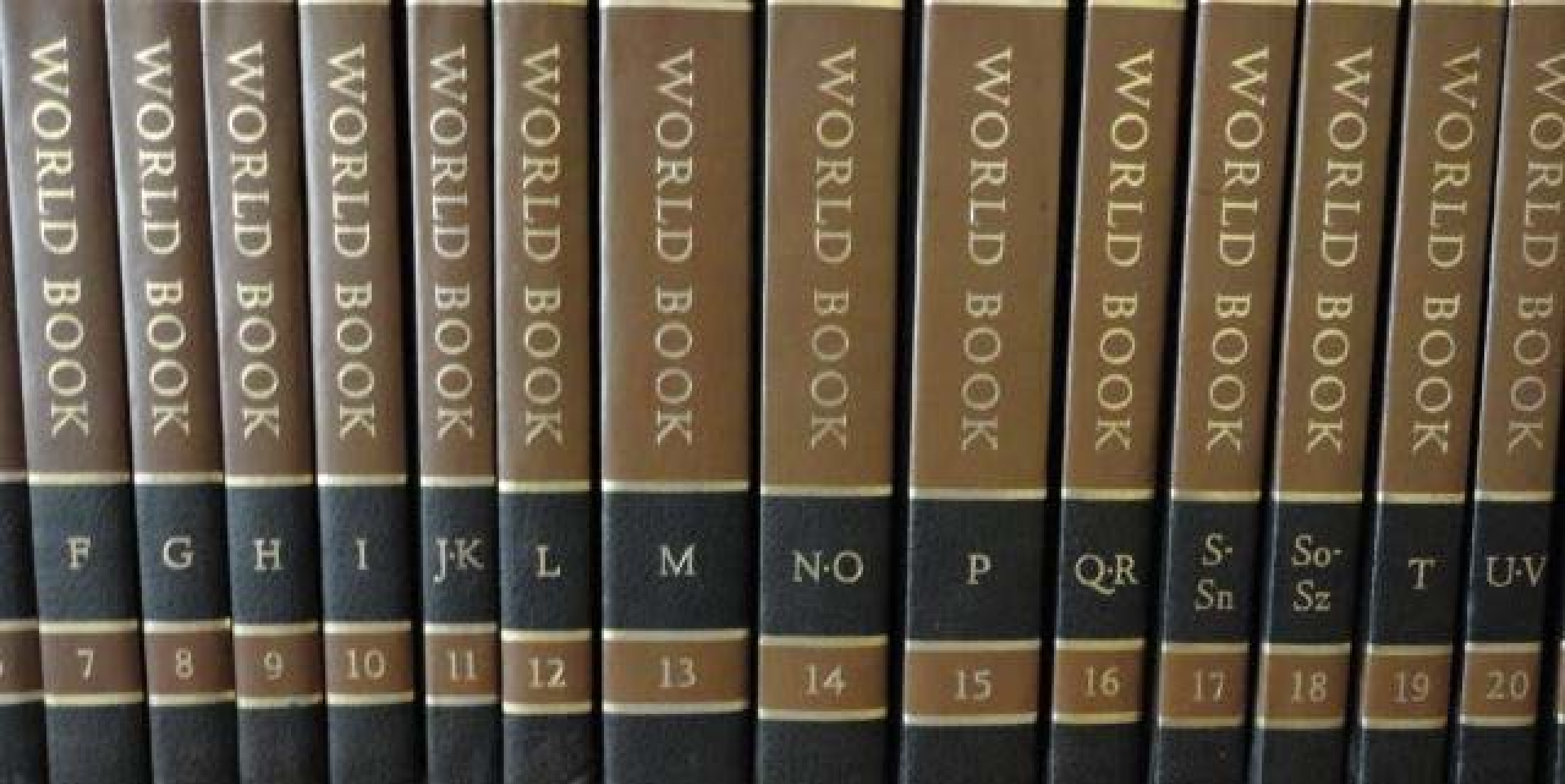


# PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

## Backfire Effect

When a person's beliefs are challenged, rather than reevaluating them in the context of the new information, the person digs in, and their beliefs become more entrenched

Nyhan & Reifler, 2009



IS THIS NEW?

No.

# FRACTURING OF INFORMATION

Few major news networks

- Driven by money—advertising
- Centrist to appeal to most people
- Created a shared reality

Prior, 2007

# FRACTURING OF INFORMATION

The best thing about the Internet is that anyone can publish.

The worst thing about the Internet is that anyone can publish.

# FRACTURING OF REALITY

## Internet

- Practically infinite amounts of info
- People are forced to make choices
- Generally choose the information that's most comfortable

# FRACTURING OF INFORMATION

## Internet

- Also driven by advertisers by courting a very specific audience for very targeted ads
- Appeal to their values and vanity
  - Intelligence
  - Specific language

Prior, 2007

**TECHNOLOGICAL FACTORS**



ALGORITHMS TAILOR SEARCH RESULTS TO SEARCH  
HISTORY/PATTERNS

Filter Bubble  
Eli Pariser



# SEARCH LANGUAGE

Google does not answer questions

Google looks for words you've typed so that it can deliver documents with same language

# IS GLOBAL WARMING A HOAX?

Global Warming + Hoax

IS GLOBAL WARMING  
REAL?

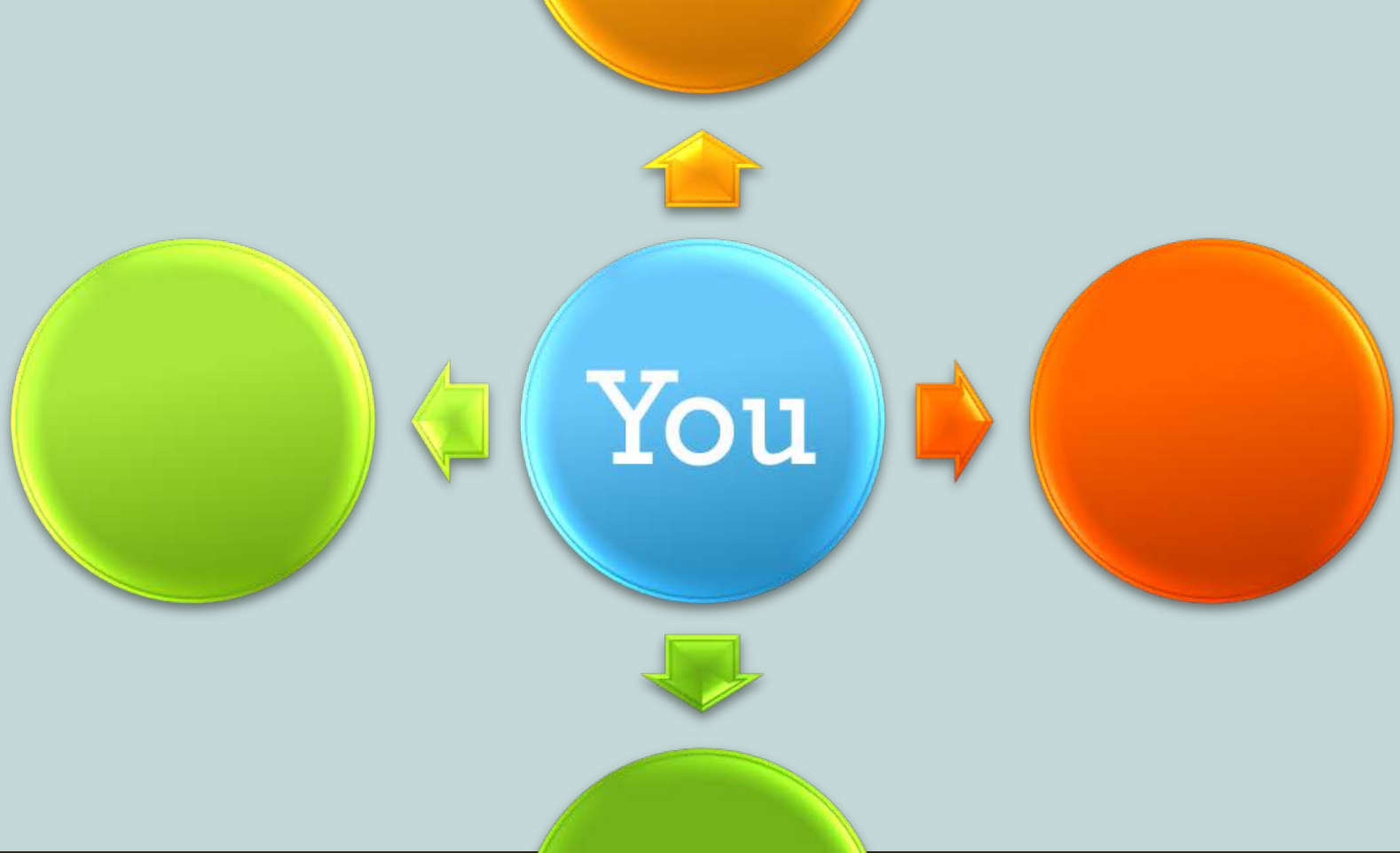
Global Warming + Real

ECHO CHAMBER

Hello

Hello

Hello



ACTIVE SEEKER



PASSIVE CONSUMER

# SOCIAL MEDIA

More and more people getting their news online

People like to share stories that validate their beliefs

Which often leads to heaps more validation from online friends

HOW DO WE CHOOSE  
WHAT TO CONSUME?



# INFORMATION FORAGING

Based on hunter/gatherer

Implies information seeking  
behavior is instinctual

Pirolli & Card, 1995

# INFORMATION SCENT

Refers to the textual clues of an item as it appears in the results list; perceived usefulness based on these clues:

- Language
- Images

# INFORMATION DIET

The information you consume

# REINFORCED

## Human Nature:

- Cognitive Dissonance
- Selective exposure/Confirmation Bias
- Backfire Effect

## Technology

- Filter Bubbles
- Search Language
- Social Media
- Information Foraging

# RESULTS

No shared reality

Extreme polarization

Breakdown of civil discourse

# THE PROBLEM WITH “FAKE NEWS”

# THE PROBLEM WITH “FAKE NEWS”

Technically the Onion and the Borowitz report are “fake news,” so the term is imprecise and essentially meaningless

# THE PROBLEM WITH “FAKE NEWS”

It's not our term

Used by prominent people to  
discredit unfavorable news  
coverage

Using the term implies that we're  
buying into that specific narrative



# THE PROBLEM WITH FAKE NEWS

A meaningless, catchall term.

Call it what it is: Propaganda,  
misinformation/disinformation,  
lying...

**WHAT CAN WE DO?**

# ALA CORE VALUES

Access

Diversity

Democracy

Education & Lifelong Learning

Intellectual Freedom

Social Responsibility

# RECONCILING

Source evaluation is not the same  
as censorship.

# WHAT CAN WE DO?

Reprogram brains to:

- Seek out information to learn and understand, not to validate
- Tackle cognitive dissonance by reevaluating our views/beliefs in the context of new information
- Develop these habits of mind

# WHAT CAN WE DO?

Focus on young people

Teach information literacy early and continuously (scientific method, too!)

Take advantage of our roles as authority figures to guide them in their information consumption

# WHAT CAN WE DO

Ultimately, we need to change people's motivations for seeking information--

Building bridges, not walls

Building communities, not factions

Seeking understanding, not validation

Seeking learning & exploration, not ignorance and isolation

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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